

LIVING CREATURES
Taught by Willis E. Bishop

From Study in Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:4, 5: And I looked, and behold, a stormy wind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with a fire engulfing itself. [The Hebrew there intends to picture a fire which flares up and recedes, like a gas stove where the flame leaps up and folds back in.] A brightness was all around it, and out of it, like the color of bright amber [that is bright metal - out of the midst of the fire]. Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures.

This was their appearance - they had the likeness of a man. Some of the older versions translate that as "beasts," but it is the word for "living creatures."

Turn to chapter 10:15. This vision that Ezekiel sees in chapter 1 appears later in the book on occasions, and this is one of them.

Ezekiel 10:15: And the Cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the river Chebar." [Here we have an identification of the living creature - they are cherubim.]

Verse 20: This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. [We are dealing with cherubim in chapter 1.]

God has quite a number of different creatures. We need not be surprised at that because He is an infinite God. We are familiar with angels in the Scripture - multitudes of angels. There are also seraphim, which occur only in Isaiah chapter 6:1: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. And there were standing above Him seraphim. Each one had six wings - with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. [This is the only chapter in the Word of God where seraphim occur.]

I have a personal opinion concerning Daniel chapter 4 - I think there is another creature here. This is the story relating to Nebuchadnezzar and a great tree, which in the chapter represents Nebuchadnezzar. In verse 13 Daniel says: I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, coming down from Heaven. And he [that is, the watcher] cried aloud and said thus, "Chop down the tree, cut off its branches."

In verse 17: This matter is the decision of the watchers.

I personally think that when we get to speak to Daniel we'll find that "watchers" is another order of creatures of God. Seraphim, angels, watchers, and they had quite a bit of authority in connection with cutting down that tree at the order of God.

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Back to Ezekiel 1, dealing with cherubim, and there are different orders of cherubim. In Exodus 25, they had only one face. Those were the ones that were over the mercy seat. They faced each other and the Shekinah glory was underneath the mercy seat. They had only one face. In Ezekiel 41 we find that there are cherubim that have two faces. Here in Ezekiel chapter 1 and verse 6 each one had four faces. Sometimes they have a different number of wings. In Ezekiel 1, verse 6 they had four wings. In Revelation 4, verse 8 they have six wings.

So I repeat, they have a different number of faces, a different number of wings, and they also seem to have in some cases different faces. Some have tried to say that these are contradictions in the Word of God but that is not true at all. It is simply that there are different kinds of cherubim.

Q. Does this refer to their work? [The different kinds of faces.]

A. I don't know that the Scripture spells that out for us. For the ones with four faces, some have tried to spiritualize that into referring to the four Gospels. But I don't think there is any biblical basis for it. I am not familiar with any Scripture that says why they have different faces. It just seems to be in the variety of things that God has made.

The cherubim have different jobs. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden, God placed some cherubim at the entrance so they would not be able to get back in and eat of the tree of life and live forever in their fallen state. So they were guardians in some cases. And in Ezekiel chapter 1 they are bearers of the throne which is mentioned in verse 26.

The first chapter of Ezekiel is one of the more remarkable chapters in the Word of God. In verse 1 we note that Ezekiel the priest saw some visions of God. We have noted that one of the first things he saw, in verse 5, were some living creatures, which we identified as cherubim. There is a description of them.

Verse 6: Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.

Notice the first part of verse 9: Their wings touched one another

In verse 11: ... Their wings stretched upward; two wings of one touched the other, and two covered their bodies.

Verse 23: And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and on the other side two which covered his body.

In verse 5 there are four cherubim. Notice that their wings touch one another, verse 9, and their wings, in verse 11, stretched upward.

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In touching one another they reached out. In verse 11 it says their wings stretched upward.

In verses 15-18: Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, one wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workmanship was, as it were, the wheel in the middle of the wheel. When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions. They did not turn aside when they went. As for their rims, they were so high that they were awesome, and their rims were full of eyes all around the four of them.

A description of the wheels. Beside each of the cherubim there was a wheel. The wheels were so high that they were awesome, fearful almost to be beside them.

It reminds me of some of my days in high school. My close friend at that time had a father who was the superintendent of a large factory. Near my home there were what we called three mud shops. The workers took clay and molded it into conduits. Each of those shops was powered by a steam engine located in a big section of the building. On the side of the steam engine was a wheel that must have been 30 or 40 feet high, and on that wheel was strapped a belt that powered all the rest of that mud shop. The entrance was at an upper level with a walkway leading to the lower level. As that wheel would run while I was going from the upper level to the lower level I was always fearful because of the tremendous, awesome sense of power in that wheel. They had dug a well and half of the wheel was running in that well for safety's sake. As Ezekiel saw this vision, he saw this whole thing as awesome.

Verses 5-23: Also from within it [that is, from within this fire] came the likeness of four living creatures [or cherubim]. And this was the appearance: they had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. Their feet were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces. Their wings were stretched upward. Two wings of each one touched one another, and two wings covered their bodies.

And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

And the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning, and the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning [speedily].

And as I looked at the living creatures, behold, one wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. And the appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workmanship was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes all around the four of them. When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went, and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

You get a basic idea of what Ezekiel saw coming from the north. Four cherubim joined together, wings lifted up and wheels beside each one. Where the cherubim went the wheels went, and where the wheels went the cherubim went. They went speedily as a flash of lightning, in verse 14, and they moved together as Ezekiel saw them coming from the north.

Some details:

A wheel in the middle of a wheel, verse 16. There are two possibilities. For example, your automobile has a wheel in the middle of a wheel. The rim holds the tire and then there is a hub. And some understand the wheel in the middle of a wheel is like that. Some understand it in another way. There is one wheel going one way and another wheel going the opposite direction, at right angles. If this is the case, that could explain that the wheels did not turn when they went; they could go either way without turning. They didn't have to turn to look because they had a face on each side, and they moved wherever they went together.

Re the faces. In verse 10 there is the face of a man, of a lion, of an ox and of an eagle. Some have tried to make that into a representation of the four Gospels. I don't think that is the intent. It

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is simply the appearance of these particular creatures. We enjoy watching nature programs, and I am amazed at the variety of creatures God has put on this earth: under the sea, weird things and in the rain forest, weird things, at least from our point of view because they are not like us.

I think that is true here in connection with these four faces. As I pointed out earlier, in some cases where cherubim appear they have a different number of wings and a different number of faces. There are just different kinds of cherubim.

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